

Minutes of Meeting of the VisitScotland Board held on 30 July 2026 at VisitScotland Glasgow Office

- Present:** Stephen Leckie (Chair)
Barbara Smith
Lindsey Paterson
Steven Walker
Cara Aitchison
Shona Marsh
Paul Easto
- In attendance:** Vicki Miller (Chief Executive Officer)
Rob Dickson (Director of Industry and Events)
Jamie Manson (Director of Corporate Services)
Cat Leaver (Director of Strategy and Competitive Intelligence)
Mike Slack (Chief Technology Officer)
Lynn Jack (Chief People and Culture Officer)
Emma Hallington (Senior Advisor to CEO)
Laura Kirk (Business Manager)
- Observers:** Kevin Fallon, Sponsorship Team Leader (Scottish Government)
- Apologies:** Jill Walker (Director of Marketing)
- Minutes:** Laura Kirk

INTRODUCTIONS

- 1. The Chair welcomed the attendees to the meeting. Noting Director of Corporate Services’ first Board meeting. Apologies noted for Jill Walker.

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 26 March 2026

- 2. The minutes of the Board meeting held on 26 March 2026 were approved as a true and accurate record.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

- 3. No conflicts of interest were raised for this meeting.
- 4. Lindsey Paterson and Shona Marsh noted updates to their Register of Interests.

MATTERS ARISING

- 5. All matters arising were confirmed as either completed or covered during today’s meeting.

POLICIES FOR APPROVAL

6. The Director of Corporate Services presented 11 policies for approval, noting that a review of the policy matrix is underway to streamline the number of policies requiring Board approval. The Board also considered updates to the authorised signatories, including the addition of the Chief People & Culture Officer and Chief Technology Officer as authorised signatories for lower-value contracts, reducing the need for approval by the CEO or Director of Corporate Services
7. The Director of Corporate Services noted the updates to the Travel & Subsistence Policy in line with recent HMRC approved mileage rates and this change backdated to 6th April.
8. The Board discussed recent updates to guidance on Equality Impact Assessments. The Chief People & Culture Officer advised that reviews of relevant policies, workplace plans, office estate arrangements, and facilities are being undertaken to ensure alignment with recent developments and announcements.
9. The Director of Corporate Services provided an update on the operation of the Complaints Policy and the intention to bring a refreshed policy back to the Board in October, including a streamlined process, refreshed complaints-handling training, website updates, and improved complaints reporting.
10. The Board discussed staff engagement on policies, with the Chief People & Culture Officer noting ongoing engagement with the local union branch and robust internal communications to support a high level of staff awareness.

The Board were content to approve all 11 policies.

ACTION: Revised Complaints Policy process and findings from the pilot to be presented to the October Board.

BOARD STATEMENT ON BRIBERY, FRAUD AND TAX EVASION

11. The Director of Corporate Services presented the proposed Board Statement on Bribery, Fraud and Tax Evasion, outlining the good practice principles set out in the paper and seeking approval for publication on the VisitScotland website. The Board discussed arrangements for reporting any incidents and noted that these would be reported through the Audit & Risk Committee, with urgent matters escalated to the ARC Chair as required.

APPROVAL: The Board approved the publication of the statement on the VisitScotland website.

BUDGET REFORECAST

12. The Director of Corporate Services advised that overall income and expenditure for FY25/26 remains in line with the budget that was approved earlier in the year.
13. A minor budget reallocation was proposed to offset a cost pressure that arose during the first quarter. An underspend of £30k on staff costs was noted, which would offset the £30k costs associated with the termination of a property lease.
14. The Board discussed the approach to allocating costs and noted that forecasts are based on established trends and budgetary assumptions, with the current underspend helping to absorb costs that have moved into this financial year.

APPROVAL: The Board approved the reallocation of budget from staff costs to estate costs.

ARC UPDATE

15. The Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee (ARC) provided an update from the meeting held on 18 June 2026, including progress on the FY25/26 financial statements and annual reporting process.
16. The Board noted the positive internal audit opinion and the Annual Fraud Report, with no significant issues raised.
17. The Chair of ARC highlighted planned Board training on AI and cyber security and provided an update on discussions to strengthen ARC capability through the co-opting of a former Board member to the ARC. Kevin Fallon confirmed that the Sponsor Team had no concerns with progressing the appointment.
18. The Board noted the appointment of Henderson Loggie as internal auditors, following a rigorous procurement process.
19. The Director of Corporate Services presented the risk update and invited feedback on the current approach to risk reporting, noting some duplication between reports presented to the Audit & Risk Committee and the Board.
20. The Board noted that the overall risk position remains stable, with no significant changes since March. Two new risks have been added relating to the sustainability of transformation benefits and ongoing public sector reform requirements, alongside the continued risk associated with negative tourism narratives.
21. The Director of Corporate Services outlined plans to review risk reporting across the organisation, bringing together strategic, operational, and ABC-related risks to provide a more integrated view of VisitScotland's overall risk position. The Chair welcomed the improved readability of the reporting, with Board content to receive in this format going forward.

ACTION: Director of Corporate services to progress with the co-opting of Keith Nicholson to Audit and Risk Committee.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

22. The Director of Corporate Services presented a revised Financial Performance Report covering the period to 31 May, providing a more concise overview of financial performance. It was noted that income is ahead of profile, driven by VisitScotland Connect activity, with staff costs remaining on track and only one minor budget reallocation required.
23. The Director of Corporate Services summarised progress against ABC expenditure commitments, supplier payment performance, and key finance performance indicators and that further process improvements are being implemented to streamline supplier payments.
24. The Director of Corporate Services outlined plans to enhance forecasting and reporting, including greater visibility of forecast outturns across each organisational pillar and updates on workforce planning, expected to conclude in September. The Chair of ARC welcomed the increased financial detail and improved transparency within the report.

All were content with the revised presentation and inclusions of the report.

2025/26 ANNUAL ACCOUNTS UPDATES

25. The Director of Corporate Services provided an update on the 2025/26 Annual Accounts, noting that preparations remain on track, with accounts due to be submitted to Audit Scotland for external audit.
26. It was noted that there are no significant changes to reporting requirements and that the accounts remain on schedule for Board approval in December, prior to submission to Parliament and subsequent publication.

CHAIR REPORT

27. The Chair provided an update following attendance at the recent BTA Board meeting, highlighting challenges being experienced across other NDPBs and opportunities to share best practice across the sector.
28. The Board discussed differing funding approaches across the UK nations and noted VisitScotland's strong performance, supported by continued investment and organisational capability.
29. The CEO advised that VisitBritain has expressed interest in learning from VisitScotland's approach to major events and noted recent engagement with the Westminster Committee on this topic.
30. The Director of Industry & Events highlighted VisitScotland's leadership and expertise in major events, noting the importance of maintaining momentum as VisitBritain's role in this area evolves.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE REPORT

31. The Chief Executive Officer noted changes to performance reporting, including separate quarterly progress reports with RAG status updates and twice-yearly key performance metric reporting aligned to ABCs.
32. Positive feedback from the First Minister on World Cup engagement was highlighted, together with activity to promote Scotland's tourism offering through trade, tour operator, and partner engagement. Ongoing activity in support of the FIFA World Cup and Commonwealth Games, alongside continued engagement with key partners and stakeholders was discussed. The CEO noted the value of longstanding international partnerships, including collaboration with Meet Boston and media partners in the US market.
33. It was noted that the Scottish Open attracted record attendance figures this year, alongside positive feedback from Commonwealth Games CEO Phil Batty on VisitScotland's support and engagement.
34. The Board noted the completion of the EventScotland brand transition, with channels and communications updated and positive stakeholder feedback received on the clearer connection to VisitScotland.
35. An update was provided on Public Sector Reform activity, including collaborative work to support rail travel, development of a strategic framework, and cross-sector partnership working. The Board also noted ongoing political engagement with ministers, MPs and MSPs.
36. The Board discussed current visitor economy trends, noting continued growth from European markets alongside domestic challenges arising from cost-of-living pressures.
The Board reviewed destination and visitor management activity, including work to address pressure on visitor hotspots through infrastructure investment, digital tools, improved visitor dispersal, and pilot activity within National Parks.

37. The Chief Technology Officer discussed the potential role of AI in travel planning and how emerging technologies may support visitor distribution and destination management objectives.
38. The Board considered the importance of a place-based approach to tourism development, ensuring regional priorities, opportunities and capacity are reflected in future planning and investment decisions.
39. Updates were provided on sector and market opportunities, including continued growth in golf tourism and ongoing work to strengthen insight and data relating to outdoor and active tourism.
40. The Board discussed the future funding of events activity and the balance between business-as-usual delivery and longer-term strategic priorities, noting the need to maximise impact within existing resources.

BUSINESS PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

41. The Chief Executive Officer outlined updates to the Business Plan Progress Report, including changes to the reporting format and the timeline for future updates.
42. The Director of Industry & Events provided an update on destination development activity, highlighting progress on major investment projects, including the Eden Project and Centre Parcs, alongside ongoing engagement with regional economic partnerships to ensure the visitor economy is represented in regional growth discussions.
43. The Director of Industry & Events noted continued momentum across the events portfolio, including confirmation of the Tour de France gala dinner, innovative activity linked to DP World Tour events, and a year-on-year increase in contracted events, with 45 international, regional and golf events currently being supported.
44. The Director of Industry & Events highlighted ongoing work relating to potential future major golf events, including the Ryder Cup and Solheim Cup, and noted that the implications of recent policy commitments will continue to be assessed.
45. The Director of Strategy & Competitive Intelligence provided an update on Data & Insights activity, including development of the Market and Insight Portal, National Events Tracker, and work to improve staff engagement with visitor economy insights and internal communications.
46. The Chief Technology Officer highlighted ongoing work to strengthen data and technology capabilities, including the use and governance of AI, enhanced cyber security monitoring, positive staff engagement with phishing awareness programmes, and the continued development of a central data repository.
47. The Chief Technology Officer noted progress in developing business and industry data dashboards and advised that the data centre relocation project remains on track, with delivery expected by the end of August subject to network and connectivity requirements.
48. The Director of Corporate Services provided updates on corporate services activity, including Oracle system upgrades to enhance reporting functionality, the onboarding of new internal auditors, and ongoing work to improve organisational processes and controls.
49. The Director of Corporate Services also outlined progress on improvements to procurement processes and governance arrangements, including updates to procurement templates, delegated procurement authority, and development of a Governance Handbook to ensure consistency across the organisation.
50. The Chief People & Culture Officer provided an update on workforce planning and organisational development activity, including reviews across several business areas, enhanced employee engagement activity, and work to strengthen internal communications and change readiness.

51. The Chief People & Culture Officer highlighted ongoing work to ensure compliance with evolving employment legislation and policy requirements, including updates relating to recruitment, probation, employment rights, and the development of a menopause policy.
52. The Chief Executive Officer sought the Board's views on the enhanced reporting. Board members welcomed the stronger alignment to the Corporate Plan and the additional detail provided, while noting the importance of ensuring reporting clearly reflects areas of challenge as well as progress. The Board discussed the application of RAG ratings, including the distinction between activities that are not yet started and those that are off track.
53. The Senior Advisor to the CEO noted that the reporting approach will continue to evolve, with financial performance reported separately. The CEO highlighted the need to balance the pace of change with available organisational capacity and resources.
54. The Board discussed governance arrangements, including the number and purpose of steering groups and programme boards, and noted the importance of maintaining clear structures that support delivery while avoiding unnecessary complexity.

ACTION: Director of Industry & Events to provide further information on Ryder Cup and Solheim Cup opportunities.

ACTION: Review the application of RAG ratings to ensure a clear distinction between activities that are not yet started and those that are off track.

The Board was content with the updates provided.

PEOPLE & CULTURE PLAN – LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK, VALUES, STAFF ENGAGEMENT, & STAFF SURVEY PLANS

55. The Chief People & Culture Officer presented the People & Culture Plan & Workforce Development update, noting that delivery remains on track for completion by September. The Board received an update on workforce planning, skills development and organisational design activity, focused on ensuring the organisation has the capability, capacity and resilience required to deliver the Corporate Plan now and in the future.
56. The Board noted the launch of the new leadership framework, which is being embedded through performance management, learning pathways and leadership development activity. Updates were also provided on staff engagement plans, workforce sustainability, succession planning, and preparations for the annual staff survey and staff conference.
57. The Chief People & Culture Officer highlighted ongoing work to ensure the organisation remains responsive to changes in employment legislation and workforce needs, while balancing affordability, retention, recruitment, and future skills requirements. The CEO also noted significant progress in reviewing and redefining roles across the organisation.
58. The Board welcomed the progress made and provided positive feedback on the overall approach, particularly the leadership framework, workforce planning activity and welcomed the approach to monitoring staff engagement through pulse surveys. Members also discussed staff retention, succession planning, performance management, pay competitiveness, and opportunities to strengthen collaboration across the wider public sector.

59. The Board considered the ongoing challenges associated with public sector pay settlements and workforce affordability and agreed to consider future engagement with the Scottish Government to highlight the implications for financial sustainability, workforce planning and service delivery.

ACTION: Ensure time on the agenda for the Strategy Away Day to discuss future workforce.

VISITSCOTLAND AI POSITIONING

60. The Chief Technology Officer presented the proposed AI positioning approach and invited Board feedback. The Board discussed opportunities for AI adoption across various aspects of the organisations work and agreed with the key principles outlined in the paper. The Board considered the importance of maintaining Scotland's authenticity in the marketing of the destination, transparency and governance in the use of AI, while supporting a curious approach to where AI in its many forms could support the ambitions of the organisation in a managed way with appropriate guard rails. The Board discussed staff and Board engagement with AI, benchmarking against wider public sector best practice, and the importance of embedding digital and AI considerations within organisational planning.

ACTION: AI to be included as a standing item on Board Agenda's going forward.

ACTION: The Chief Technology Officer to survey Board members on their own knowledge and usage of AI to inform Board requirements including L&D.

PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM

61. The Chief Executive Officer provided an update on Public Sector Reform activity since the June Board meeting which included a paper to The Director General of the Economy on future VisitScotland as part of a wider functional review of Government and Agencies. The Board noted that VisitScotland remains well positioned to contribute to the reform agenda with the Chief Executive Officer highlighting examples of cross agency projects and regional partnership working. Further direction is expected from Scottish Government once Parliament reconvenes after summer recess. The Board were encouraged that Scottish Government are exploring thematic reviews and not just reviews of public bodies within existing clusters. The Board agreed that Public Sector Reform should remain a standing item to support ongoing strategic discussion.

ACTION: Include Public Sector Reform as a standing agenda item for future Board meetings.

AOB

62. The Chair noted the next Board meeting is scheduled for 8 October with Fife proposed as the meeting location, to be confirmed.

CLOSE

Thereafter, the meeting was brought to a close.